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ABSTRACT

This report contains the results of a formative evaluation of the subschool system at Hamilton Senior High School in the state of Western Australia. To implement the subschool system, the school, housing grades 8 through 12, was divided into smaller administrative and social units. In the final stages of reorganization, the school was made up of four subschools--one containing grades 11 and 12, and three schools that each contained grades 8, 9, and 10. Each school was housed in a separate part of the building and had its own head. Data were collected through staff questionnaires, staff and student interviews, and classroom observations. Information from examination results, minutes of school meetings, school reports, and school notices was also used. Results indicated many advantages of the subschool system, including teachers' increased attention to student development, greater staff involvement in and commitment to the school, and an improved home-school relationship. Problems included a need for additional resources, abuse of teacher tolerance, the danger of declining academic standards, and incompatibilities of subschool heads and staff. The report also focuses on implications for other school systems, including detailed characteristics of subschool organization and functions, and the process of planning and implementing change. (Author/JM)

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SUBSCHOOLS

DISCUSSION PAPER
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Discussion Paper No. 4

SUBSCHOOLS: REPORT OF A STUDY OF PLANNED CHANGE IN A GOVERNMENT SECONDARY SCHOOL

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June, 1978

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FOREWORD

"Subschools" is intended to promote discussion about ways of making large schools more pleasant for teachers and students. Some large schools have experimented in substantial ways with approaches to ensure that teachers and students are respected as persons, without detracting from the function of these institutions as places of learning. This report focuses on the reorganization of one such school, Hamilton Senior High School, and the degrees of success experienced by its staff in making the school more humane.

Judgements and descriptions presented here arise from a study carried out in co-operation with the school by the Research Branch of the Education Department. This report takes the main findings of the Research Branch study and supplements them with suggested implications for schools. This approach may prompt readers to reflect on the appropriateness of Hamilton's aims and changes for their own situations.

While "subschools" does not indicate Departmental endorsement of subschool organization as a panacea for large schools, it does reflect the position that school staffs should be continually seeking ways to improve learning environments. It acknowledges the laudable efforts of Hamilton's principal and staff in this regard, although not all of their plans have yet reached fruition.

The study was undertaken by Mr M. Williams, with assistance from Research Branch colleagues. Important contributions were made by Hamilton's Principal, Mr F. Usher, and staff members, particularly Mr N. Hyde and Mr R. Maisey.

D. Mossenson

DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF EDUCATION

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Chapter One
INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In early 1975, the Research Branch was invited to evaluate Hamilton Senior High School's subschool system. The invitation came from the school's principal and staff, and was endorsed by the then Director of Secondary Education. The Research Branch responded by assigning one officer who could devote considerable time to the study while others in the Branch would provide support.

Evaluation is often confused with making final judgements about something. In this study, the evaluation was to be formative, not final. It was to provide information that could help the principal and staff in the continuing development of Hamilton's programme. The main purpose of the study was to review progress made to the end of 1976 as a basis for planning subsequent initiatives.

In addition to providing information for people within Hamilton, the study would enable an analysis of the subschool system's strengths and limitations to be prepared for a wider audience. This document presents the results of that analysis.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions do not always emerge neatly at the beginning of a study. In this case, it was necessary to understand the aims of the subschool system and to identify the system's components before it made sense to ask questions about the viability of the subschool system. Once the principal and staff had further clarified their statements about Hamilton's subschool system, it became possible to seek answers to these questions.

- To what extent had planned changes relating to subschool organization been implemented?
- What impact did these changes have on the
  - management of the school?
  - personal welfare and development of students?
  - academic practices and standards of the school?
- How consistent were these outcomes with the stated aims of the school?
- What were the costs and benefits of the changes implemented at Hamilton?

1.3 METHODS OF INQUIRY

After taking into consideration the purposes of the study, the time available, and the questions to be answered, it was decided that a field study approach would be most appropriate. A field study approach depends on a researcher familiarizing himself with a social setting by observing, questioning, and gathering available materials such as reports and records. Although some researchers regard this as "soft" methodology (as opposed to "hard" or quantitative approaches), there is no reason for such field research to ignore opportunities for collecting numerical data.

Consequently, information was gathered in various ways and from many sources in the school. Two questionnaires were completed by staff. One was to gauge the staff's commitment to the subschool programme, while the other enquired into decision-making. Both provided evidence used in subsequent planning.

The perceptions of a number of staff and 25 per cent of 1975's Year 12 students were obtained through structured, recorded interviews. In addition, numerous discussions were held with staff and students under less formal conditions.

Systematic observations were conducted in more than 40 lesson periods, with 16 of Hamilton's 30 lower school classes. These were augmented by informal observations both within and outside classrooms.

Valuable information was already available in the school. Examination results were collated from school records. Subschool timetables were transcribed. Minutes of subschool and senior staff meetings for 1975-76 were collected. So, too, were reports written by visitors and staff members, and minutes, letters, bulletins, and other notices that circulated within the school.

As in many studies, there was an abundance rather than a paucity of data. The research questions guided the selection of relevant information from the volume that was available. As a result, it was possible to suggest answers to the main questions that seemed plausible to staff, though not all the answers were pleasant.

1.4 OUTCOMES OF THE STUDY

Feedback was given to the school in two ways. Oral reporting of findings prompted many discussions with the principal and senior staff, particularly. Draft reports and working papers also were distributed and were well received. They gave rise to discussion and provided information for planning. Probably the most important finding in this respect was that Hamilton's changes in organization and administration had not affected classroom practices to the degree anticipated by the staff.

As a result, staff identified curriculum improvement as the priority area for development. Subsequently, the school applied to the Disadvantaged Schools Programme for funds which would enable the appointment of a full-time curriculum co-ordinator. The application was successful, and led to the employment of a co-ordinator in late 1977.

The study also provided the basis for a staff review of aspects of the school. Most important among these aspects were the opportunities that teachers experiencing classroom difficulties have for obtaining help, the responsibilities of subject senior staff, and the organization of class councils.

Senior officers of the Department were provided with an impartial view of Hamilton's subschool system. Benefits, limitations, and difficulties associated with the system were outlined.

Information that might be of interest to a larger audience also emanated from the Research Branch study. This document is one form in which such information will be distributed. Hopefully, it will help school staffs to focus attention on possibilities for making schools increasingly responsive to the needs of individual students and staff. It should also demonstrate the challenges associated with the planning and maintenance of school-based improvements.

1.5 CONTENT OF THIS REPORT

Two major themes are pursued here. The first relates to the substantive features of Hamilton's subschool system. Characteristics of subschool organization and functions are described. Advantages and problems associated with subschools are considered, and implications for schools are suggested. This focus is maintained in Chapters Three to Five.

The second theme is the process of planning and implementing change. The approach employed at Hamilton is examined, especially in Chapter Two. It is suggested that the success of an innovation depends as much on who is involved and how it is introduced as on its characteristics.

Chapter Two

BACKGROUND TO THE SUBSCHOOL SYSTEM, HAMILTON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

2.1 PROFILE OF THE SCHOOL

Hamilton Senior High School is one of the Education Department's larger schools. For the past five years, its student enrolment has been fairly steady, in the vicinity of 1 200. However, the Year 11 and 12 component has increased rapidly since 1974, as the retention rate at the Year 10-Year 11 boundary has risen from approximately 30 per cent in 1974 to 50 per cent in 1976.

The school was declared a disadvantaged school under the Federal funding programme because a substantial proportion of its students came from low-income homes. In a recent survey of parents conducted by the school, it was found that 62 per cent of breadwinners were untrained workers, who tend to constitute the lowest income group. While 28 per cent were trained tradesmen or skilled workers, only 10 per cent reported their occupations as managerial or professional. Furthermore, the vast majority of the latter were tradesmen who had become subcontractors.

Hamilton's student population is ethnically mixed. More than a third come from homes in which one or both parents are Southern European. Staff indicate that many of these parents are not fluent in English. Other large groups of non-Australian born parents include Asians and British. The combination of ethnic variety and low socio-economic status suggest that Hamilton's students would have diverse needs and interests.

Like other Government secondary schools, Hamilton attempts to cater for students of all backgrounds and abilities up to the end of Year 10. Years 11 and 12 tend to be more specialized. Although Hamilton has been divided into subschools, it also has the subject departments common to other high schools.

2.2 RATIONALE FOR CHANGE

The subschool system arose out of a need for change that was perceived by Hamilton's principal and a group of staff. Although more is said later in this chapter about the principal's role in the process of change, it might be noted here that the principal was the dominant figure in the identification of the need for change. On his appointment to Hamilton in 1971, he examined the school's organization and practices and found them wanting. While other staff shared this view, the principal was in the best position to articulate and publicize the perceived needs. This he did to effect, convincing a majority of staff that significant changes were required.

The main problem identified by staff was that *a large minority of students were alienated from the school.* Alienation refers to a sense of indifference, narrowness in perception, estrangement, and concealed hostility. At Hamilton, it showed itself in vandalism, tense relations between some teachers and students, aggression among students, apathy towards schoolwork, and a preoccupation with discipline by teachers.

Staff concluded that the school needed to provide teachers and students with more opportunities to establish valued relationships. It was thought that the alienated minority did not feel respected within the school. Some of the factors that contributed to this situation were suggested by staff. These included the following:

- Organization of the school on a subject basis alone was detrimental to the provision of adequate care for all students. It was argued that when each teacher was responsible for teaching his subject to as many as 200 students, it was difficult to treat each student as an individual. Among the problems that were perceived with subject department organization were

  (a) Co-ordination between departments was poor, so that students often had to satisfy different demands from different teachers. There was no opportunity for all of a student's teachers to co-ordinate their efforts.

  (b) Absenteeism from period to period was difficult to control because of lack of co-ordination between subject departments.

  (c) Since students did not belong to any one teacher or group of teachers, pastoral care was incidental rather than deliberate. Many teachers were concerned about the overall welfare of individual students, but there was no organizational support for these teachers.

- Streaming of lower school students on the basis of performance in the four core subjects (English, mathematics, science, and social studies) had unintended, harmful consequences. Among these were

  (a) The descriptive term "students working at the Basic level" was abbreviated to "Basic" students by teachers and pupils alike. A label for a standard of work became a label of personal identity, its connotation of "dullness" potentially a savage blow to any student's self-esteem. Once classified in this way, a student had to face the fact that, as far as the school was concerned, he was a failure. Some accepted this quietly, but others were openly antagonistic to the school.

(b) A "non-academic", anti-school student culture was likely to arise when students who were defined as failures by the school were grouped together and categorized publicly as "basics".

(c) Between lessons, whole classes of disaffected students moved around the school together. Hostility was directed towards teachers, students in the "Advanced" stream, and school property.

(d) Teachers often did not like teaching classes of students working at the Basic level. The emphasis on abstract, scholastic knowledge in the syllabus was meaningless to these students, some of whom were reluctant to co-operate with teachers anyway. Some teachers saw their functions with "Basic" students as body-minding and time-filling.

- Support for teachers with discipline and control problems was inadequate. The size of the school ensured that the two people who had major responsibility for helping teachers with discipline (the deputy principal and principal mistress) generally acted only after disturbances had occurred. Discipline tended to be equated with punishment rather than prevention. The main problems seen to stem from this were

(a) Symptoms rather than causes of misconduct were dealt with. The principal and staff found that it was easy to overlook the domestic and school difficulties that gave rise to misconduct under this system. Guidance staff tended to be consulted only when a student became conspicuous.

(b) Punishment of students whose misbehaviour was related to unsatisfactory home circumstances often served only to alienate the students from school. Hamilton's records contain numerous examples of students who were struggling with an unhappy domestic situation and a demanding school environment.

Apart from student alienation, another problem that Hamilton's principal identified was *the lack of opportunity for staff involvement in school management*. He believed that teachers were overly dependent on the senior staff and administration for direction. It was his view that well-reasoned debate should precede decision-making and action on major issues. Conventionally, teachers had not had opportunities to influence decision-making in such a way.

A third problem was *the absence of a partnership between the school and the home in the education of children*. Hamilton's principal and staff felt that parents required encouragement to find out about the school and ultimately to contribute to its policy. Special efforts would be needed to involve parents who were not fluent in English, or whose domestic circumstances made it difficult for them to visit the school.

While the principal and a majority of staff agreed with this diagnosis of Hamilton's problems, some teachers did not see a problem at all. This minority argued that students had to obey authority and to adapt to conditions that might not suit them. Their view was that real life was tough and repressive, and that students would have to endure it eventually. However, this group of teachers agreed to go along with the majority in order to give the changes a chance to succeed.

2.3 AIMS OF THE PLANNED CHANGES

Following the diagnosis of problems at Hamilton in 1971-72, a series of changes were planned by the principal and staff. These changes were guided by various aims which had arisen from perceived needs. Over the years, these aims have been written in different ways, but the underlying themes remained the same. The statement below is the most recent version, which has evolved from continuing negotiation between the principal and staff.

The planned changes were intended to

- *Improve student learning*

  The *learning climate* will be improved by (a) improving interpersonal relationships and pastoral care; (b) rewarding students for good work instead of punishing them for misbehaviour; (c) reducing stress and tension in the school through improved teacher-student dialogue; (d) preserving the self-esteem of students and safeguarding their personal dignity and status.

  The *curriculum* will be characterized by (a) flexibility; (b) emphasis on skills and attitudes, as well as knowledge; (c) concern for learning relevant to adult life, including parenthood, career competence, the law of the land, and social responsibility.

  Learning processes will be improved by (a) co-ordinating the efforts of teachers within a developmental rather than subject framework; (b) using student interests as the starting point for learning; (c) employing the positive influence of the peer group; (d) recognizing teaching as exchange rather than merely the transmission of information by teachers.

- *Shift responsibility to students*

  Students will develop the confidence to make decisions and bear responsibility for their actions by being given the chance to participate in academic and personal decisions in supportive school situations. The school will encourage students to (a) have a say in what they study, through the selection of options and timetables; (b) decide on their personal appearance; (c) be responsible for their own behaviour during recess and lunch times; (d) undertake assignments outside the school without teacher supervision; (e) make correct decisions by rewarding them rather than imposing sanctions.

- *Foster the professional development of teachers*

  Teachers will gain a professional identity by having responsibility devolved upon them in the areas of school management, governance, and curriculum development. Specifically, this will be achieved by (a) the establishment of teacher committees with authority over different areas; (b) making support and guidance available for teachers who want to take educational initiatives; (c) granting teachers the right to participate in school management through their subschools.

- *Enlist the aid of parents in a working partnership with staff*

  Parents will be encouraged to develop the insights, vocabulary, and awareness of the educational process necessary for them to become partners in the schooling of their children. The school will guarantee parents the right to (a) enter the school; (b) consult teachers about the progress of their children; (c) participate in making decisions about the educational experiences to which their children will be exposed.

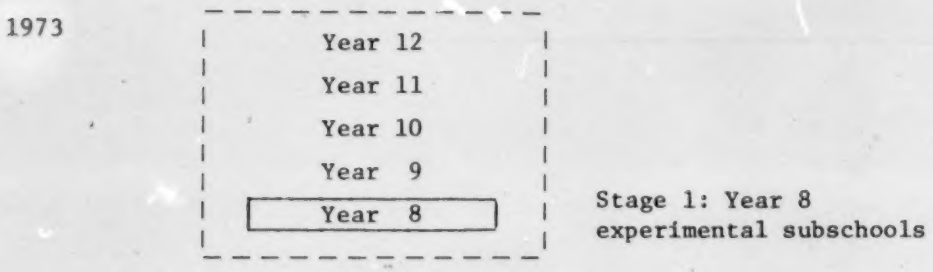
- *Develop a curriculum pertinent to the needs of the school community*

  Shortcomings are recognized in both the lower and upper school curricula. Reformation of the curriculum will be achieved only through the commitment of teachers to necessary changes, and with the co-operation and understanding of students and parents. Specialist support from outside the school will also be required.

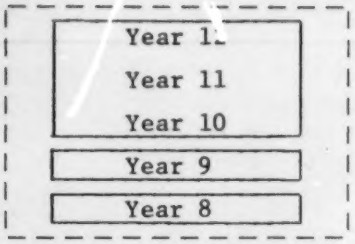
The aims expressed here are consistent with the stance adopted in the Education Department's Dettman (1969) and Discipline (1972) Reports on secondary education. They provide a basis for the judgements made in this document about the effectiveness of Hamilton's subschool programme.

2.4 HAMILTON'S PLANNED CHANGES

The fundamental change proposed at Hamilton was the division of the whole school into smaller administrative and social units. These subschools developed from an experimental unit that operated in 1973. The three stages of development are summarised schematically below:

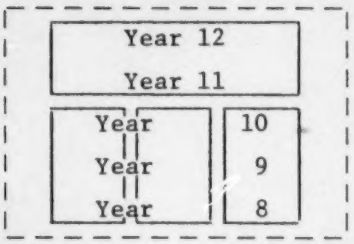


1974



Stage 2: Three "horizontal" subschools

1975 and later



Stage 3: One "horizontal' and three "vertical" subschools

Specific changes related to Hamilton's reorganization also were proposed. The following recommendations were made:

- The day-to-day administration of a subschool was to be the responsibility of the teacher in charge (referred to as the "subschool head" in this report).
- Subschool heads were to be elected from and by Hamilton's professional staff, excluding the principal.
- Each subschool was to be provided with an office, manned by a clerical assistant who would act as subschool secretary and who would provide an important communication link with Hamilton's central office, and with other subschools. The subschool secretary would handle much of the routine administrative work, such as the collection of forms and the distribution of notices, leaving the subschool head free to carry out other duties.
- Acting senior master status, salary and conditions were to apply to subschool heads. They were to teach for 24 periods each week; the remaining 16 periods would be divided between teaching preparation and subschool management.
- In addition to their administrative responsibilities, subschool heads were to co-ordinate their subschool's educational programme, liaise with other senior staff, provide educational leadership, communicate with parents, and attend to the welfare of students and teachers within the subschool.

- Although the architectural constraints were formidable, each subschool was to be geographically discrete. It was proposed to reduce the prominence of the faculty system by bringing teachers from different subject departments into a subschool, which would then be allocated a group of rooms in one section of the buildings. However, the location of specialist facilities would prevent this applying to manual arts and home economics.

- Teachers were to be placed in subschools as nearly as possible in accord with their preferences. It was hoped that each teacher would identify primarily with a single subschool, although it was inevitable that some teachers would have to teach in two or more subschools. Teachers who were eligible for promotion would be given the opportunity to gain the requisite upper school teaching experience, but this would necessitate some transfer of teachers between subschools.

- Subschools were to develop timetables that would be as independent and flexible as staffing arrangements would permit. It was hoped that this would enable the development of new options, integration of parts of some subjects, team teaching, and other strategies to improve the learning experiences for students.

- Subschool staff meetings were to be held fortnightly. They were to enable teachers to participate in decisions about issues that concerned their subschools, to review and propose subschool policies, to share their knowledge about students in the subschool, to co-ordinate their efforts (especially in pastoral care), and to convey their opinions to the principal and other senior staff. In short, the staff meetings were to ensure that teachers had a legitimate voice in managing the subschools.

- Significant changes were suggested in the roles of the senior administrators as responsibility for a great proportion of internal administration, student discipline, and co-ordination of teachers was devolved to the subschools.

  The principal was to give priority to educational leadership, particularly by being informed about trends and research findings in education, and by maintaining a accurate overview of Hamilton's activities.

  Timetable maintenance and school administration were to be major functions of the deputy principal. He was to relinquish his involvement in disciplinary support, and was to concede his previous role as preparer of the timetable to the subschool heads.

  The principal mistress was to play a more varied part in school management. She was to become a vital link in the subschool-central office chain of communication, and would maintain most of the correspondence with outside institutions on behalf of Hamilton. Furthermore, she was to co-ordinate the collection of attendance figures and would oversee the welfare of girls, but some responsibility for these activities was to be transferred to the subschools.

While the planned changes listed above related specifically to the establishment of subschools, a number of other changes also were proposed. Although they were the sorts of reforms which could have been undertaken whether or not a subschool system existed, they were deliberately designed to make the school more humane, thus their consideration at this point is warranted. These changes were

- Core subject teachers in the lower school were to be encouraged to take classes for two or more subjects. This strategy was intended to increase the amount of contact a student had with his teacher, although it would reduce his contact with different teachers. The rationale for increased exposure to one teacher was that students who had more opportunity to get to know and be known by their teachers would be more likely to be treated as persons. This suggests that teachers would take differences between students into account when planning classroom activities, and would use different techniques to deal with the various problems that different students may cause. It was assumed that the best basis a teacher had for deciding what to do with different students was to know them well.

- Ability or performance-based streaming was to be discontinued. Each class was to contain students with different academic strengths and social backgrounds, in order to overcome the anti-school counter culture that had arisen because of the existence of a "non-academic" stream of students. By making classes supportive groups which did not judge their members by their scholastic achievements alone, it was hoped that self-esteem of alienated students would be preserved.

- Students were to be given opportunities to participate in a wide range of decisions about their learning activities. Among the ways planned were

  (a) In the upper school, each student would have 12 periods per week during which he did not have to attend classes. During this "flexi-time", as it was to be known, a student could meet with teachers, who would be on call, or could engage in private study. Teachers would guide and advise students, but students ultimately would decide for themselves how to spend their flexi-time.

  (b) "Sampling options" were to be provided for Year 8 students, to give them experience of areas into which they might not otherwise venture. The options would be mini-courses in fields such as drama or photography that would last 10 weeks. Each Year 8 student would take part in four such options in a year.

(c) Students were to plan and undertake small group and individual educational excursions into the community. They would be responsible for arranging the excursions and for reporting their findings back to teachers and classmates. The value of the local community as a learning resource was to be highlighted.

(d) Individualized programmes of work would be introduced, so that students would be able to work on activities at the rate and to the depth that their interests and strengths allowed.

(e) Additional courses would be prepared to give students greater choice in their school studies. This, like the intention above, was a distant prospect rather than an immediate hope.

- Upper school students were to participate in weekly tutorials, consisting of informal meetings between a teacher and 10 to 15 students. Students were to select the teacher they wanted as tutor since the tutorials were to have a pastoral care function. Discussion was to be broad in scope and open in approach. It was hoped that teachers and students would gain a fuller appreciation of one another as persons by sharing their concerns, opinion, and experiences.

- Lower school students would conduct class meetings, to be known as class councils, on a weekly basis. A prime purpose of the councils was to give students a chance to reflect on their own behaviour and to develop a code of conduct to which they would adhere willingly. Other functions were to include communication between students and administration and planning of social activities.

- School rules were to be reduced to a "do unto others" maxim. The booklet which listed 72 school rules was to be put aside in the light of this decision. Staff generally supported the view that students' behaviour would not deteriorate if school rules were made less prominent. In the principal's opinion, it was more important that students themselves worked out a standard of morality than for them to be coerced into complying when they were supervised, only to break all the rules when external constraints were removed. Central to this process of moral development was well-reasoned, sympathetic guidance from teachers. Therefore, rules that required students to wear school uniforms and to avoid certain hair styles would be phased out.

- Corporal punishment by teachers was to be disallowed.

- Discipline was to be preventive, not punitive. Teachers were to be responsible for anticipating and averting student problems, instead of treating them after they had caused distress to all concerned. This was possible if teachers knew their students well, and if they shared their knowledge of students with one another.

- Teachers were to wield greater influence upon the administration of the school through membership of a staff council and a finance committee. The staff council would be a representative body, consisting of two members from each subschool. The finance committee, whose membership was to be drawn from the teaching staff, was to raise funds and decide on school expenditures. It was to take over the fund-raising role previously performed by the Parents and Citizens' Association, and the budgeting function once executed by the administration.

- Parents were to be better informed about the life of the school through the following strategies.

  (a) Parents were to be given an open invitation to observe classroom activities and to attend school functions.

  (b) Subschool heads were to place priority on informing parents of school matters, through personal interviews or parents' evenings. Parents were also to be kept in touch with their children's progress.

  (c) A parents-student-teachers council, to act as an advisory board for the whole school, was to be established. It would concern itself with educational matters, and would be the instrument through which parents could influence Hamilton's policies and practices.

2.5 STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

The process of change at Hamilton has entailed at least three phases of activity. First, there is the identification and articulation of needs and problems. Then there is the planning stage which culminates in decisions about what changes are required. The third stage is the implementation of change.

Although the three stages might appear to be sequential, they are actually simultaneous and continuous. Neither identification of needs nor planning of changes has ceased at Hamilton, although these activities clearly were most important at the beginning of the subschool programme.

The principal has been dominant in the first stage, particularly early in the programme. He has stimulated discussion of issues and has encouraged staff to propose strategies for solving the school's problems. He was also instrumental in obtaining Departmental support for the subschool system.

The principal has played a less central role in planning the changes, although many of them were adaptions of his ideas. Much of the detailed planning was undertaken by a small group of staff who volunteered for the experimental subschool in 1973. Their proposals underlie many of the planned changes outlined in the previous section.

Since 1973, planning has tended to be done by the subschool heads. The two more experienced subschool heads have guided the planning process, but all past and present subschool heads have made substantial contributions to the development of the school.

Implementation of changes ultimately depends on every staff member. A majority of staff have accepted the proposals for change, but not all have the social and teaching skills required to put the plans into operation. However, the principal and subschool heads have actively encouraged the implementation of change at all levels within the school.

2.6 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGES

Most of the changes listed earlier were put into effect by Hamilton's staff, but a few of the more important ones were not. These are considered briefly in this section.

Difficulties were encountered in effecting significant changes in the roles of the deputy principal and principal mistress. Long standing expectations of staff concerning the disciplinary function of the deputy principal and the principal mistress were not easily replaced. This problem is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Changes less directly related to the subschool form of organization proved more difficult to implement. The following planned changes either were not put into operation or proved to be unsuccessful and were subsequently abandoned.

- Subject specialization was not overcome. Core subject teachers attempted to take two subjects or more, but complained that their teaching suffered as a result. After a number of attempts, the idea was not pursued.

- Streaming was not entirely abandoned. Mathematics teachers insisted that their subject required ability-based grouping, and won the concession that lower school students would be streamed for mathematics.

- Individualized programmes of work were introduced only to a limited extent. Most teachers continued to teach classes by conventional methods, so that students tended to do the same work at much the same time.

- New, more relevant courses were introduced into Year 11 for students terminating their studies in that year. However, the core subjects continued to be compulsory in the lower school, although some flexibility was possible in the numbers of periods set aside for these subjects each week.

- Well-reasoned debate of moral issues took place less frequently in the classroom than the principal envisaged. Unless time was set aside deliberately, teachers and students seemed too busy to consider the merits of the rules and sanctions which regulated classroom behaviour. Classroom activity had a taken-for-granted quality which defused the sort of debate that the principal might have expected.

- The parents-students-teachers council was established in 1973 and functioned intermittently until it was allowed to lapse in 1975. It seems that the council ran out of topics for discussion, although the principal had invited it to contribute to school-based curriculum development. Since 1975, attention has been given to involving parents at the subschool rather than whole school level.

It has already been noted that most of the planned changes were put into operation. However, not all had consequences anticipated or desired by Hamilton's staff. These are considered in Chapter Four. Beneficial outcomes are reviewed in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three
BENEFITS OF THE SUBSCHOOL SYSTEM

From the school's point of view, changes which had consequences that were consistent with the school's aims, rationale, and policies were beneficial. In this sense, the subschool system's effects generally were beneficial.

This chapter outlines benefits of the subschool system that were identified in the Research Branch study. They are considered in terms of:

- Care of individual students.
- Staff involvement in management.
- School-home liaison.
- Curriculum organization and practices.

3.1 CARE OF INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

The organization of Hamilton Senior High School into four subschools provided the basis for increased attention by teachers to the development of individual students. This occurred both formally and informally. Formal arrangements are discussed first.

- Subschools maintained a file on each student in their care. Reports, letters from or to parents, notes on interviews with students and parents, samples of work, and background information on students were kept on file. Teachers had access to student files, and were encouraged to use them to help students.
- Each student was known by a small group of teachers, including the subschool head. It was the latter's responsibility to focus the attention of teachers on students whose backgrounds or school conduct suggested that they were in need of assistance. This often occurred in the fortnightly subschool staff meetings. In addition, teachers themselves often drew attention to particular students who needed special care.
- Subschool heads provided support for teachers who encountered serious cases of misconduct in the classroom. Support was given in a number of ways, after the subschool head was approached by the teacher. Usually the subschool head and teacher would examine the student's file together. Often, other teachers would be asked if they were having trouble with the student, and would be advised to help him where possible.

If the student continued to misbehave, he would be interviewed by the subschool head, who sought to establish reasons for the student's misbehaviour. The student would be warned that he should change his ways. Further misconduct resulted in interviews with the student and his parents, or a visit to the guidance officer.

Sometimes, students were taken out of class and supervised directly by the subschool head. In cases where student misconduct appeared to be unrelated to home or school tension, students might be detained after school or suspended from school.

As a rule, students were treated with tolerance and concern by subschool heads and teachers. The case histories of numerous students at Hamilton suggest that such treatment was in order. Punishment aimed at suppressing misconduct may in many instances have served only to aggravate unfortunate situations that were beyond the control of the student. Without a subschool system, it is likely that disciplinary measures may have been directed less prudently.

- Every lower school class held a council meeting during one period each week. Although it seemed that teachers did not agree on the purposes of the class councils or on procedures to run the meetings, some did provide students with a genuine opportunity to make their opinions known to staff. However, organizational factors such as the size of the group, the duration of the meeting, and the extent of preparation required for the meeting resulted in most councils being ineffective.

- Upper school classes had a weekly tutorial period, in which 15 students met with a teacher. The purpose of the tutorial was to provide extra care for individual students, but the effectiveness of tutorials varied from teacher to teacher. However, most students regarded tutorials as beneficial. As one student commented,

> "The greatest benefit is that I have got to know my tutor well. I can see he's human. Since we've had tutorials in the upper school, I think they have brought teachers down to our level. We clown around in tutorial, but there is always advice from experienced persons if you need it."

A number of informal arrangements supplemented or arose from the formal arrangements outlined above. These included the following:

- Informal contact between subschool staff was high. This occurred during breaks in school time and in social gatherings out of school hours. Such contact increased the potential for co-ordinated approaches to students.

- Subschool camps and recreational excursions enabled teachers to observe students out of the school setting. Teachers reported greater understanding of students as a result of participation in these activities.

- Informal contact between senior students and teachers was considerable. Often this emerged from participation in tutorials, where arrangements would be made for students and teachers to go out to dinner or to have a coffee evening.

It is argued that the subschool system facilitated the development of these arrangements, which in turn led to greater awareness by teachers of the qualities of individual students.

3.2 STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Teachers made use of the new opportunities that Hamilton's subschool system offered for involvement in making and implementing decisions. As a consequence, the staff were committed to the school's policies, and reflected a sense of responsibility for its practices. They were responsible individually for their classroom teaching and collectively for the operation of their subschools. As a staff, they shared responsibility for mapping out the school's policies. The means for exercising these responsibilities are considered below.

- Subschool staff meetings tended to be productive in terms of decision-making. The minutes of these meetings indicate that staff were involved in making significant decisions about the policies and practices of subschools. By 1976, there was a common expectation among staff that major decisions about subschools were to be made democratically.

- Within subschools, it was common for staff to organize themselves into committees or working groups to accomplish certain tasks. Examples of these include groups formed to arrange parents' evenings, to review homework, and to plan new optional subjects.

- Staff exercised responsibility for the operation of the school by electing subschool heads. This right gives teachers considerable influence over the policies adopted by subschools.

- The fortnightly subject department meetings provided teachers with another formal opportunity to influence decision-making. However, such meetings are held regularly in many other high schools.

- Whole school staff meetings were held occasionally and for specific purposes. Decisions affecting the whole school tended to be made or ratified at these meetings. An example was the acceptance by a majority of staff of a proposal to change the procedures for the election of subschool heads.

- Two permanent committees gave staff an official voice beyond their subschools and subject departments. These are the staff council and the finance committee.

The staff council has eight members, two from each subschool. It provides a channel of communication between the teaching staff and the central administration. Legitimate functions include proposing policy changes, stimulating discussion on educational issues, supporting individual teachers with grievances, and organizing whole staff meetings and school elections. The council's status has continued to grow since its inception in 1974.

Hamilton's finance committee handles all aspects of fund raising and expenditure. The chairman prepares an annual budget with the assistance of the committee. Members are responsible for revenue collection and for considering requests for expenditure. The principal does not possess the right of veto, nor have his requests received preferential treatment.

Through their involvement in the staff council and the finance committee, teachers have learned to exercise authority and to decide between competing priorities. The principal and staff regard the two bodies as important vehicles for participation in Hamilton's management.

- School-based professional development has been organized by a staff committee. Topics of major seminars have included literacy across the school, assessment, and the preparation of objectives.

In a questionnaire survey on decision-making, two thirds of the staff indicated that the subschool system had enabled them to play a more satisfying part in the management of the school. Many made reference to the emphasis on group decision-making and to the amount of consultation in which they were involved, which they claimed did not occur in subject-centred high schools. However, in addition to increased opportunities for all staff to become involved in decision-making, the most significant aspect of the subschool system was the devolution of responsibility for day-to-day administration to the subschool level.

Routine management of the subschools was the responsibility of subschool heads, who in effect, were, teaching principals of small schools. The subschool heads were capably assisted by subschool secretaries, who were female clerical assistants attached to the subschool offices. Teachers also helped in various ways, such as in the collection of attendance records.

3.3 SCHOOL-HOME LIAISON

The subschool system enabled contact between staff and parents to be improved. Three strategies led to this result.

- Subschool heads typically initiated contact with parents for specific purposes on behalf of staff. They did this by letter, telephone call, or personal visit. When parents entered the school, they saw the subschool head first. Most staff interviews with parents were conducted by the subschool head.

- Parents also were encouraged to see the school in action. During 1973, a majority of parents of students in the experimental subschool visited Hamilton. Visits declined sharply in subsequent years although staff continued to welcome parents.

- Staff-parent contact nights generally have been organized on a subschool basis. These have attracted a majority of parents. Some contact nights have been organized on a class basis, and these also have proved popular.

3.4 CURRICULUM ORGANIZATION AND PRACTICES

- In the upper school, alternative courses were available for students not continuing to tertiary institutions. A commercial course and a so-called "terminal" course for Year 11 students were provided. The latter attracted 39 students in 1977, out of a total of 157 Year 11 enrolments. Teachers involved in the implementation of the terminal course developed objectives for the students, and a set of criterion-based report forms. Students were informed about their strengths and weaknesses through criterion-referenced assessment. Objectives and an assessment policy for the rest of the upper school are being revised at this stage.

- Upper school students had 12 periods per week set aside as "flexi-time", which could be used according to their own priorities. Some attended tutorial-like sessions with teachers during this time, while others studied by themselves. Senior students felt that "flexi-time" was useful in enabling them to act responsibly, despite evidence that some were making decisions which teachers found unacceptable.

- In the lower subschools, variety was provided by the availability of mini-courses known as "sampling options" in Year 8, and the usual optional subjects in Years 9 and 10. However, the total curriculum for lower school students tended to be conventional.

- Year 10 students who did not intend to continue their schooling were given work experience, organized by the youth education officer. This consisted of up to two weeks employment in jobs which the students hoped or expected to undertake upon leaving school. Work experience was one way to increase the relevance of school studies to the students' future.

- Subschool organization has enabled staff to meet in small groups to review curriculum practices. Reviews have occurred in staff meetings and have given rise to planning by staff committees. However, this has been a recent development rather than an integral part of the subschool system.

A number of observers have expressed surprise that Hamilton's classroom practices seemed so much like those of other high schools. The subschool system as yet has had little impact on teaching and learning methods, but it has the potential to provide the organizational basis for significant improvements to the curriculum. Consistent with this, curriculum improvement is the school's priority during 1978.

Chapter Four
LIMITATIONS OF THE SUBSCHOOL SYSTEM

While Hamilton's subschool system has led to improved care of individual students, increased staff involvement in school management, better contact with parents, and greater attention to curriculum improvement, it has had certain costs and limitations. Hamilton's staff have agreed that the benefits outweigh the difficulties, but it seems appropriate here to identify some of the pitfalls that were associated with the subschool system. Limitations and costs are discussed under the following headings:

- Need for additional resources.
- Difficulties in changing roles.
- Abuse of teacher tolerance.
- Danger of declining academic standards.
- Incompatibilities of subschool heads and staff.
- Decision-making processes.

4.1 THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Completely independent subschools, in terms of teachers and facilities, would be a costly proposition in most schools. Hamilton's subschools were not entirely independent in either regard, but their introduction did require the use of extra resources.

Two additional clerical assistants were employed to act as secretaries to subschools. Clerical assistants were essential to the management of subschools, as they relieved the subschool head and staff of much routine administrative work.

It is difficult to calculate the number of extra teachers assigned to Hamilton to operate the subschool system because staffing procedures for secondary schools embody an element of negotiation which enables schools to obtain extra teachers for approved projects. Most secondary schools receive considerably more than their basic allocation of teachers, and Hamilton is no exception. However, an analysis of secondary school staffing indicates that Hamilton has not received preferential treatment relative to other high schools. It is suggested, therefore, that the introduction of the subschool system has made a difference of one, or perhaps two, teachers to Hamilton's staffing. If the subschool system was to cease, no more than two teachers would be withdrawn from Hamilton.

Subschool heads were paid as acting senior masters. This additional salary amounted to the equivalent of employing another teacher. Nevertheless, formal recognition of the status and responsibilities of subschool heads was necessary.

The cost of the subschool system was at least the salaries of two extra clerical assistants, two additional teachers, and one teacher-equivalent each year. At present rates, the annual cost to the Education Department is in the vicinity of $50,000.

4.2 DIFFICULTIES IN CHANGING ROLES

Implementation of the subschool system required the reallocation of certain responsibilities, most specifically in the areas of discipline and administration. Those most affected by these role changes were the principal, deputy principal, principal mistress, and subject senior staff. Difficulties arose in abandoning time-honoured duties and taking on new ones.

The deputy principal and principal mistress were relieved of responsibility for giving disciplinary support to teachers. This was now one of the major functions of the subschool head. Nevertheless, the deputy principal and principal mistress continued to feel responsible in some final sense for school discipline, although they rarely exercised executive power. Their residual sense of responsibility led to some misunderstandings among staff.

Role change was not entirely without problems for subject senior staff. Some perceived an erosion of power and status, and reacted to this situation with scepticism about the value of the subschool system. However, these misgivings were allayed by 1977, when senior staff gave their full support to the subschool system.

Hamilton's staff learned that significant role changes require time to take effect. It also was apparent that perceived losses in status, power, or responsibility can be dysfunctional. Reallocation of duties which resulted in a net loss to certain individuals could only inhibit co-operation among staff.

4.3 ABUSE OF TEACHER TOLERANCE

Prior to 1973, students were issued with lists of general and specific rules. Students were exhorted to be punctual, orderly and non-violent, and were asked to take care of their possessions. Supplementing the general rules were 71 specific items which covered behaviour related to attendance, bags, bikes, buildings, canteen, furniture, hair, litter, lockers, lost property, lunch arrangements, movement, out-of bounds areas, play, prefects, radios, rooms, smoking, stairways, teachers, timetables, toilets, uniforms, and valuables. The detail and extent of these rules suggest that they would have been difficult to enforce. Hamilton's staff confirm that this was so.

Since 1973, Hamilton has had one rule: responsible behaviour. Teachers have been expected to advise, guide, and correct students rather than to wait until specific rules have been broken. Corporal punishment has been abolished.

However, not all teachers were satisfied that the new approach to student behaviour was appropriate. A group of at least 10 staff argued for more specific guidelines, coupled with stronger support from the administration. They considered that students had not been acting responsibly. Their view was that many students had abused the tolerance of teachers.

It appears that this group of staff were reacting in part to a lack of consensus about what constituted "responsible behaviour". Subsequent to the complaints from this group, gatherings such as meetings and assemblies have been used to clarify teacher expectations concerning student conduct. Standards of behaviour continue to be a major topic of staff discussion, despite efforts to clarify expectations. Student lateness for classes, swearing, abuse of lockers, and damage to desks have not been remedied to everyone's satisfaction.

4.4 DANGER OF DECLINING ACADEMIC STANDARDS

There is no evidence that Hamilton Senior High School's academic standards have declined. Conventional measures of standards, such as Achievement Certificate grades and Leaving Certificate/Tertiary Admissions Examinations results, have not shown a systematic downwards trend. In fact, Year 12 results have shown a slight improvement, despite a substantial increase in enrolments. However, some cause for concern may be identified in the lower school.

During 1974 and 1975, results from the Board of Secondary Education's comparability tests were lower than in previous years. Senior staff attributed this to a deliberate stance by teachers of the four core subjects, who felt that the tests were inappropriate. It was believed that Hamilton's share of Advanced level awards dropped substantially because teachers did not prepare students for the comparability tests. Although this action may have been educationally defensible, it jeopardized some students' chances of gaining Advanced awards and perhaps disadvantaged them in the longer term.

There was a risk that innovation might occur at the expense of accepted academic standards if the school's policy was not co-ordinated. During 1977, attempts were made to establish priorities in curriculum implementation, with the result that staff attention was focused on learning processes and outcomes.

4.5 INCOMPATIBILITIES OF SUBSCHOOL HEADS AND STAFF

The subschool system depended on a team approach by subschool heads and teachers. Generally, subschool staffs co-operated, but there were some occasions when conflicts between heads and teachers occurred. The sources of conflict tended to be issues such as student conduct, rules, and sanctions.

Placing teachers with compatible subschool heads proved to be a problem at Hamilton. Some subschools were more popular than others, so not all teachers were satisfied with their placements. Inappropriate placement sometimes obstructed the progress of the subschool.

Election of subschool heads reduces the likelihood of gross mismatches between subschool heads and their staffs. However, there are still incompatibilities which cannot be easily resolved, as there must be in any organization.

4.6. DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

One outcome of the subschool system was that teachers were involved in making more important decisions. A corollary of this is that those who had made the decisions previously now had to cope with new approaches to decision-making. In particular, the school administration found that decisions involved more participants, more negotiation, and more time. The principal, deputy principal, and principal mistress found that their legislative capacity was being exercised less directly than before.

It took patience and a commitment to the school's policy on the part of the administration to maintain a non-dominant role in decision-making. However, they felt that the gain in teacher professionalism exceeded the cost in time and frustration.

The process of implementing decisions also tended to be complicated by the devolution of responsibility to the subschool level. Some confusion was reported concerning ultimate and executive responsibility for decisions. Continuing negotiation occurred between the administration and subschool staff on matters such as the collection of attendance figures, litter duty by students, and timetabling. By 1977, however, considerable resolution of responsibilities for implementation had taken place.

Chapter Five
IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

The previous chapters have outlined the benefits and limitations of the subschool system, as it has operated at Hamilton Senior High School. Some implications for schools interested in developing subschools may be drawn from these findings.

5.1 SUBSCHOOLS ARE MEANS TO AN END

Like other forms of organization, a subschool system is a way to facilitate the achievement of certain aims. In Hamilton's case, these aims related to student welfare, staff professionalism, curriculum improvement, and parent involvement. Hamilton's staff used the subschool system as a basis for making other changes to the school which would enable the achievement of its aims.

A school considering the implementation of a subschool system would be well advised to examine its aims. It is conceivable that the subschool system may not be the most appropriate form of organization if a school staff have an educational philosophy that differs from Hamilton's.

5.2 INVOLVEMENT OF STAFF IN PLANNING

Widespread staff involvement and commitment in planning seems essential to the successful implementation of changes. Although much of the detailed preparation may be completed by small working parties, the rest of the staff need to be kept informed, asked to respond to plans, and generally encouraged to perceive the project as their own. The roles of parents, students, and Education Department administrators are less central, but their expectations must be met if planned changes are to go ahead. Hamilton's project may have enjoyed some success because the principal was willing to relinquish his initially dominant position to the extent that the programme now is "owned" by the staff.

5.3 ROLE CHANGES: The administration and subject senior staff

Schools contemplating the development of subschools might not wish to assign responsibilities in the same way as Hamilton. A realistic appraisal of the capacities of various staff members who will undertake major roles is necessary. The subschool system will only work if responsibilities are assigned according to staff strengths.

With the creation of the subschool head position, or any other position which carries substantial administrative responsibilities, there is a danger that the deputy principal and principal mistress will perceive some erosion of their former status. There is clearly a need to reallocate responsibilities during structural changes in such a way that no role is seen to be redundant, or even threatened. Demarcation of specific responsibilities, as opposed to areas of authority, also appears necessary to prevent confusion in the performance of duties.

The significance of the subject senior master's role, with responsibility for guidance and direction in a particular subject area, probably was underplayed in the early stages of Hamilton's programme. Since that time it has become apparent that the subject senior master's part in developing and co-ordinating the curriculum must be emphasised. Without this emphasis there is some risk that staff may underestimate the school's obligation to maintain the academic performance of students. There is also the possibility that subject senior staff may resent the prominence of the subschool heads unless their own influence is safeguarded.

5.4 THE TIME FACTOR

The introduction of a major change such as the subschool system takes a lot of time. It requires discussion and planning initially, followed by implementation and more discussion. Staff need time to accommodate to new roles and to new ways of working.

Progress is rarely continuous. Often, staff associated with changes such as the establishment of new committees go through stages of commitment, doubt, disillusionment, and then if they are fortunate, renewed enthusiasm. There appear to be times too when the whole school is imbued with enthusiasm, and other times when everyone is filled with doubt about the changes being undertaken. This suggests that school leaders need to provide staff with stimulation and encouragement if changes are to be successful. Furthermore, they need to be patient, accepting the rate at which staff can cope with change.

5.5 COST

Completely separate subschools are more expensive to run than a school organized solely on faculty lines, requiring additional teachers, clerical assistants, and accommodation. Each subschool requires a teacher in charge on partial release from teaching duties, a clerical assistant, and an office. If independence is to be maximized, extra teachers and facilities may be needed. Schools might consider ways to implement forms of subschool organization without incurring additional expenses. Clerical assistants may be shared between subschools, for example, or administrative responsibilities may be shared by all staff to a greater extent.

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